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Soldier's Reprieve.

A DRAMA

IN SIX ACTS

Founded on one of the Most Thrilling Incidents
of the Great Rebellion.

—BY—

COMRADE M. J. GILTNER, CHAPLAIN

—OF—

Rice Post, No. 148, Department of Ohio,

G. A. R.

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OHIO.

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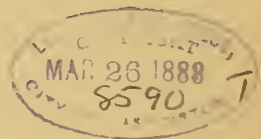
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THE SOLDIER'S REPRIEVE.

AN EPISODE OF THE REBELLION.

SIX SCENES.

CHARACTERS:

MR. OWEN, a Farmer in Northen New York.

MRS. OWEN, his wife.

BENNIE, aged 18, and BLOSSOM aged 12, their children.

ELDER ALLAN, their Pastor.

MESSENGER.

MRS. CARR, an Irish lady (a widow)

PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

THE PRESIDENT'S PRIVATE SECRETARY AND AN ORDERLY.

SERGEANTS MOORE AND THOMAS.

SIX OR MORE GUARDS.

COL. J. R. MERRIMAN, CAPTS. WILLIAMS AND FLINT AND ORDERLY.

Adjutant.

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Soldier's Reprieve.

SCENE 1—Mr. Owen and family at home—Mr Owen reading daily paper—

Mrs. O. sewing—Blossom studying lesson—Bennie interrupts his father.

Ben—Father, may I enlist in the army?

Mr. O—Why Bennie! you are too young.

B—I am as old as Jemmie Carr and he has enlisted!

Mrs. O—O dear me! I wonder what his poor mother will do without him; he is thought so much of her, and she of Jemmie; he was her only support. Poor woman!

Mr. O—I fear, wife, before the war is ended many homes will be childless and many hearts broken. But our flag is assailed and we must maintain its honor unsullied, or the blood of our forefathers will have been shed in vain.

Mrs. O—How dreadful to think of the sufferings of the poor men whose patriotism sends them from home and loved ones to sacrifice their lives in defense of their country.

Mr. O—True, dear wife, but we must remember that this is a battle for the right, against the wrong. In this, we and they have God on our side, and that means victory.

Ben—Well, father, if this is for the right, against the wrong, will you not let me go? You know you have always taught me to defend the right at any cost. And did not our minister say last Sabbath that it was a christian duty to sacrifice life rather than submit to the powers of evil? I should be ashamed, father, when I am a man to think I had never used this great right arm for my country when it needed it. Palsy it rather than keep it at the plow! If this the cause of God and humanity, and we believe it is, then he will take care of me and bring me safe home.

Mrs. O—Oh Bennie! must I give up my only son?

Ben—Mother, you have little Blossom to keep you company. I will write often and then it will be such a comfort to poor Mrs. Carr to know that Jemmie and I are going together. It is hard to leave you and Blossom and father, but you will be proud of your soldier boy.

Mrs. O—God bless you my son.

Ben—Good bye father, good bye mother, good bye sister.

Mr. O—Good bye Bennie, God go with you and keep you.

SCENE II—Curtain rises with Bennie on Picket at the edge of a wood—He sits down and soon falls asleep, his gun leaning against a tree—Sergeant of the Guard with relief comes and finds him in this condition, secures his gun, wakes him, places him under arrest.

Sgt Guard—You are my prisoner. You were asleep on your post.

Ben—(Rousing and realizing his condition) I was so tired Sergeant; I didn't mean to. O please don't report me. It will kill my poor father and mother, and dear little Blossom.

S. G—Boy, I pity you, but this is an important post, next to the enemy's lines, and a soldier must do his duty. Soldiers, take him to the guard house.

(Exit with Bennie)

MILITARY COURT.

SCENE III—Col J. R. Merriman, Judge Advocates, Capts. Williams and Flint, Staff Officers and two clerks seated at table. Orderly with Sergeants stripes standing. Judge Advocate, rising and saluting speaks:

Bro. Officers: This court has been convened by special order of General commanding this department for the purpose of trying a private of Co. "E" 9th New York V I who is reported to have fallen asleep while on duty as guard. I hope you will give this case the attention it demands in view of the fact that we are in face of the enemy where the utmost vigilance is necessary to prevent a surprise.

J. A. turning to O. G.) Sergeant bring in the prisoner. (Sergeant enters with prisoner who is seated at rear of table facing the audience.)

J. A. to Bennie—When were you last on duty?

B.—Last night

J. A.—What was the nature of that duty?

B.—I was on picket guard.

J. A.—Where were you posted?

B.—At the edge of the woods, near Culpepper, C. H. (J. A. motions Bennie to seat.)

J. A. to Orderly—Call Sergeant Moore who was in charge of picket guard yesterday. (Orderly goes out and returns with that officer.)

J. A. to Sgt. Moore—Sergeant, were you on duty as Sergeant of picket yesterday?

Sgt. M.—I was.

J. A.—You may state what, if anything of importance occurred during that time.

Sgt. M.—Last night as I was visiting the different posts I came on one sentinel asleep at one of the most important points in the edge of the woods in front of Culpepper C. H. and near the enemies lines.

J. A.—Do you know the sentinel?

Sgt.—He was a member of Co. "E" 9th N. Y. V. I.

J. A.—Could you recognize the sentinel if you saw him?

Sgt.—I believe I could.

J. A.—Is he present here?

Sgt.—That is the boy.

J. A.—That will do; you may retire.

J. A. to Bennie—What have you to say to this charge?

B.—Nothing; only I was very tired with our long march yesterday.

J. A. to Sgt. of guard—You may remove the prisoner to the guard-house and see that he is made as comfortable as circumstances will permit, but keep him strictly guarded until further orders. (Exit Sergeant with Bennie.)

FINDING OF THE COURT MARTIAL.

J. A.—Brother officers of the court, upon us devolves the solemn duty to pass upon the actions of a fellow soldier, whose conduct has been of such a character on this trial to prove his honesty in acknowledging his violation of duty, although no doubt he is well aware of the nature of his offense as well as the penalty therefor. His youth, his simplicity, his manly bearing speak volumes in his favor. But when we consider the imminent danger to thousands of lives entrusted for the time to his vigilance, lives equally as precious it becomes our sad duty to find according to the testimony given, and pass such sentence as the justice of the case demands.

THE SENTENCE, (to be read by Adjt.)

Headquarters Army of the Potomac:

In the field near Culpepper, C. H. Va., Sept 16th, '62 at a Court Martial convened at these Headquarters and authorized by special order No. 258, dated Sept. 15th, '62 from Brigade Headquarters to try private Benjamin F. Owen, Co. E. 9th N. Y. V. I.

Charge—Gross neglect of duty.

Specification—In this that private Benjamin F. Owen, Co. E 9th N. Y. V. I., while on duty as picket guard on the night of Sept. 14th, 1862, in front of the enemy, at a most important point near the town of Culpepper, C. H., Va., did fall asleep to the endangering of the lives of the members of this brigade.

The above charge and specification having been proven by the Sergeant of the guard who arrested him while asleep, and his own admission, therefore it is the finding of the court that private Benj. F. Owen, Co. E 9th N. Y. V. I. be shot to

death by musketry on the 24th instant between the hours of 9 and 11 a. m.

Signed,

COL. J. R. MERRIMAN, J. A., }
CAPT. T. B. WILLIAMS, }
CAPT. O. F. FLINT. }

Headquarters Brigade, Sept. 15th, 1862.

Approved,

GENL. O. L. MEIGS, Brigade Commander.

Executive Mansion, Washington, D. C., Sept. 17th, 1862.

Approved,

A. LINCOLN, President.

SCENE IV.—*Mr. Owen's home. Wife and Blossom sewing. Enter Mr. O. with telegram for Bennie. Reads with great emotion to wife and daughter. Wife cries. Blossom controls herself with strong effort of will.*

CULPEPPER, VA., Sept. 16th, 1862.

Dear Father:—I slept only a minute—am to be shot—will write—pray for Bennie. Only twenty-four hours.

ENTER MR. ALLAN, the Pastor.

Mr. O.—I thought, Mr. Allan when I gave Bennie to my country, that not a father in all this broad land made so precious a gift. No, not one. The dear boy slept only a minute, just one little minute, at his post; I know Bennie never dozed over a duty. How prompt and reliable he was! I know he only fell asleep one little second—why, he was as tall as I, and only eighteen! and now they shoot him because they found him asleep when doing sentinel duty! Twenty-four hours the telegram said, only twenty-four hours. Where is Bennie now?

Mr. A.—Let us hope with his heavenly father.

Mr. O.—Yes, yes; let us hope; God is very merciful! "I should be ashamed," Bennie said, when I am a man to think I never used this great right arm, and he held it out so proudly before me, "for my country when it needed it!" "Palsy it rather than keep it at the plow!" Go, then, my boy, I said, and God keep you. God has kept him I think Mr. Allan. (*These last words slowly.*)

Mr. A.—Like the apple of his eye, doubt it not.

(*Blossom sat listening too deeply affected to weep. A tap at the kitchen door is answered by her; as she opens it, a messenger hands her a letter. Returning she hands it to her father, saying only, "It's from him" Mr. Owen takes the letter, but is so nervous he cannot break the envelope, holds it out to Mr. Allan, who opens and reads as follows:*)

DEAR FATHER:—When this reaches you, I shall be in eternity. At first it seemed awful to me, but I have thought about it so much that death has no terrors. They say they will not bind me nor blind me; but that I may meet my death like a man. I thought, father, it might have been on the battle-field, for my country, and that when I fell, it would be fighting gloriously; but to be shot down like a dog for nearly betraying it, to die for neglect of duty! O father, I wonder the very thought does not kill me! But I shall not disgrace you. I am going to write you all about it; and when I am gone, you may tell my comrades. I cannot now.

You know I promised Jemmy Carr's mother I would look after her boy; and, when he fell sick I did all I could for him. He was not strong when they ordered him back into the ranks, and the day before that night, I carried all his luggage, besides my own on our march. Toward night we went in on double quick, and though the luggage began to feel very heavy, everybody else was very tired too; and as for Jemmie, if I had not lent him an arm now and then, he would have dropped by the way. I was all tired out when we came into camp, and then it was Jemmie's turn to be sentry, and I would take his place; but I was too tired, father. I could not have kept awake if a gun had been pointed at my head; but I did not know it until—well, until it was too late."

("God be thanked!" interrupted Mr. Owen, reverently. "I knew Bennie was not the boy to sleep carelessly at his post.")

(*Mr. Allan reading.*) "They tell me today that I have a short reprieve—given to me by circumstances—'time to write to you,' our good Colonel says. Forgive him father, for he only does his duty; he would gladly save me if he could; and do not lay up my death against Jemmie. The poor boy is brokenhearted and does nothing but beg and entreat them to let him die in my stead.

I can't bear to think of mother and Blossom. Comfort them, father! Tell them I die as a brave boy should, and that when the war is over, they will not be ashamed of me as they must be now. God help me; it is very hard to bear! Good-bye father! God seems very near and dear to me, not at all as if He wished me to perish forever, but as if He felt sorry for his poor, sinful, broken-hearted child, and would take me to be with Him and my Saviour in a better—better life."

(*A deep sigh burst from Mr. Owen's heart, "Amen"—he said solemnly—"Amen."*)

Tonight in the early twilight I shall see the cows all coming home from pasture, and precious little blossom stand on the back stoop, waiting for me—but I shall never, never come! God bless you all. Forgive your poor Bennie."

[Mr. and Mrs. Owen and the minister retire leaving Blossom alone, who writes a hasty note, hurriedly puts on her cloak and hat, takes Bennie's letter and puts it in her sachel, slips out and takes the train for Washington via N. Y. As she nears the door at the rear of the audience the conductor opens the door and calls out, "This train for N. Y. Baltimore and Washington. Blossom goes out and enters by the rear unobserved by the audience. Curtain slowly drops as Blossom leaves the stage.]

—MUSIC—

TWO ACTS.

SCENE V—*President Lincoln enters his private office where his private secretary is arranging papers. An orderly in waiting. President seated. Enter Blossom with downcast eyes.*

Pres L.—Well, my child, what do you want so bright and early this morning?

Blossom—Bennie's life, please, sir.

Pres.—Bennie, who is Bennie?

Blos.—My brother, sir. They are going to shoot him for sleeping at his post.

Pres.—O, yes, I remember! It was a fatal sleep. You see, child, it was at a time of special danger. Thousands of lives might have been lost for his culpable negligence.

Blos.—So my father said, but poor Bennie was so tired, sir, and Jemmie so weak. He did the work of two, sir, and it was Jemmie's night, not his; but Jemmie was too tired, and Bennie never thought about himself, that he was tired too.

Pres.—What is this you say child? Come here, I do not understand. [*Blossom goes to him, the Pres. puts his hand on her shoulder, and turns up her pale face to his, then takes a letter from her sachel and hands it to him, saying,*] "Here is Bennie's letter.

(*The President reads the letter, turns to table and writes hastily*) (*Handing the message to the orderly says:* P—"Send this dispatch at once." (*turning to Blos.*)

Pres.—Go home my child, and tell that father of yours, who could approve his country's sentence, even when it took the life of a child like that, that Abraham Lincoln thinks that life too precious to be lost. Go back; or wait until tomorrow. Bennie will need a change after he has so bravely faced death: he shall go with you.

Blos.—God bless you, sir.

Pres.—Orderly, take this child to Mrs. Willards and tell them to keep her for me until to-morrow.

Curtain falls and rises shortly with the President and private secretary still seated at the table. Orderly in attendance.)

ACT TWO.

(*Enter Bennie leading Blossom—President rising—Bennie saluting.*)

Good morning little girl, (*taking her by the hand.*) and this is your brave brother Good morning Bennie. (*shakes hands then Pres. turns to the table, picks up a 1st Lieutenants shoulder strap and fastens it on Bennie's shoulder.*)

Pres.—The soldier who could carry a sick comrades baggage, and die for the act so uncomplainingly, deserves well of his country. Here is a leave of absence for thirty days; take it and go back to that patriot father of yours, and tell him to remember Abraham Lincoln at a throne of divine grace.

Exit Blossom and Bennie—Curtain falls.

HOME AGAIN.

SCENE VI—*Rear door opens; conductor calls out "This train for Baltimore, New York, Albany and Buffalo."*

—MUSIC.—

Curtain rises—Home scene.

Mr. Owen pacing the floor—Mrs. O. seated with hands folded in contemplative mood.

Mr. O.—I think we ought to hear from Blossom soon; this is the fourth day since she went away.

Mrs. O.—How lonely it seems; it is like as though both our dear ones were dead.

Mr. O.—We and they are in the Lords hands. He will surely do what is best for us. If Blossom only reached Washington in time to see the President, I believe he will save our Bennie; at least he will not allow him to be shot.

Mrs. O.—I wonder why she does not send a telegram?

Mr. O.—Dear little girl, she does not think; she is so young.

(Enter Mr. Allan, who has met Bennie and Blossom, and persuaded them to let him precede and break the news.)

Eld. Allan—Praise the Lord! Bennie's saved.

Mr. O.—*(Grasping the pastor's hand)* Thank God!

(Enter Bennie and Blossom followed by Mrs. Carr.)

Mr. O.—*(Grasping his boy's hand;)* Praise the for his goodness! Good bless our President.

Mrs. O.—*(Embracing her boy)* God has kept my boy.^h *(then grasping little Blossom in her arms;)* O my darling daughter!

Mrs. Carr—*(In working clothes, grasping Bennie by the hand.)* Och you darlint! an' was it fur the loikes o' me, a poor lone widdy, and her only b'ye, yez cam' so near bein' an angel! God bliss yer sowl, and sure as long as the good Lord laves us breath to dhraw ye'll niver want a friend in Jemmie nor his poor lone mither

God grant the howly angels may iver kape ye from harrum, and may ye be a bigger man nor the President hissill; shure then and ye deserve it.

Mr. Allan—Let us sing.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise him all creatures here below,
Praise him above ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.



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